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ABSTRACT

Psychiatric rehabilitation differs from traditional approaches to mental health, because it places much greater emphasis on the importance of the person's relationship with the environment. In psychiatric rehabilitation, the importance is not placed on finding a cure for the client's mental illness; rather, what matters is the ability to hold a job, to live independently, and to enjoy a reasonably happy life. Interviewing, as it is ordinarily taught, focuses on the thoughts, feelings, and internal responses of the person being interviewed. This paper presents characteristics of behavioral interviewing, an assessment tool designed to identify information of value in helping persons with psychiatric disabilities live more adaptive lives. The behavioral interview approach is two sided, and is consistent with the psychiatric rehabilitation model because both the person and the environment are important focal points in the assessment process. The central defining feature of a behavioral interview is the attempt to elicit objective and verifiable descriptions of events. The following dimensions of behavior about which can be inquired are discussed: frequency, variety, intensity, consequences, amount, rate, direction, latency, conditions, and duration. Contains a table of questions asked in behavioral interviews contrasted with questions typically asked in a standard counseling interview. (JBJ)

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Behavioral Interviewing in Psychiatric Rehabilitation Assessment

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Abstract

Interviewing, as it is ordinarily taught, focuses on the thoughts, feelings, and internal responses of the person being interviewed. The behavioral interview approach is two sided, and is consistent with the psychiatric rehabilitation model because both the person and the environment are important focal points in the assessment process. The central defining feature of a behavioral interview is the attempt to elicit objective and verifiable descriptions of events.

Behavioral Interviewing in Psychiatric Rehabilitation Assessment

Psychiatric rehabilitation differs from traditional approaches to mental health, because it places much greater emphasis on the importance of the person's relationship with the environment (Antony, Cohen, & Farkas, 1990). In traditional mental health approaches, the objective has always been to make the client "well" according to some standard. In psychiatric rehabilitation the importance is not placed on finding a cure for the client's mental illness. Rather, what matters is the ability to hold a job, to live independently, and to enjoy a reasonably happy life. If you succeed at what you do, living independently, supporting yourself successfully, it matters little if someone thinks you are eccentric. This paper presents characteristics of behavioral interviewing, an assessment tool designed to identify information of value in helping persons with psychiatric disabilities live more adaptive lives.

A standard psychiatric diagnosis assigns a category of the DSM-IV to the person being assessed. A psychiatric rehabilitation diagnosis focuses on the demands and inherent resources of the environments surrounding the client, as well as the skills possessed by the client. The environment and the person's behavior are more important as assessment considerations than whatever is going on in the mind of the person.

The behavioral interview approach is two sided, and is consistent with the psychiatric rehabilitation model because the person and the environment are both considered (Jenkins, DeValera, & Muller, 1977). On the persons side of the rehabilitation equation emphasis is placed on identifying and teaching skills demanded by the major environments surrounding the person. From one client to the next, skill demands vary because the environments differ. On the environment side, we identify and provide the natural supports that might be available to the person or those supports we might have the opportunity to develop.

Behavioral Interviewing

The goal of the behavioral interview is to obtain information that is specific and can be verified. This is accomplished by asking the interviewee to describe events, environmental situations and corresponding behavior. Unlike opinions and other vague statements, behavior can be double checked, cross referenced and verified. In ordinary social conversation, or in traditional interviewing, we tend to focus on completely different dimensions. Ordinarily we ask people to interpret the causes of their behavior. We also tend to use abstract constructs, like intelligence and motivation. In a behavioral interview the aim, as much as possible, is to focus on measurable and objective concepts.

Behavioral interviewing has a different focus than the kind of interviewing that is widely taught in counseling programs. Interviewing, as it is ordinarily taught, focuses on the thoughts, feelings, and internal responses of the person being interviewed (Egan, 1994; Rogers, 1980). Questions ordinarily asked in interviews are "Tell me how you feel about that", " Could you tell me more about your opinion?" Traditional interviewing is focused on the subjective experiences of the individual. The approach in behavioral interviewing is different because it focuses on the relationship between the person and the environment, and attempts to elicit objective and verifiable descriptions of events.

From a behavioral interviewing standpoint we may say that behavior can be either adaptive, non-adaptive, or maladaptive. Both adaptive and maladaptive behavior are of rehabilitation significance. Adaptive behavior is that which promotes a functional relationship between the person and the surrounding environment. Non-adaptive behavior, such as talking to yourself, is self-generated, self-initiated behavior that doesn't necessarily have any relationship to the environment. Mumbling is non-adaptive because it serves no useful purpose. Similarly, if a person experiences hallucinations,

such as hearing voices, and speaks back to those voices, that would be non-adaptive behavior because the source of those voices really isn't there. Carrying on a conversation under those circumstances is not a requirement of the environment.

Maladaptive behavior is actually a sub-category of adaptive behavior. In whatever society you live, you are considered to be demonstrating adaptive behavior when actions conform to the expectations of the dominant culture. When behavior conforms to a sub-culture, and if that behavior is at odds with the dominant culture, then it's referred to as maladaptive. When an urban teenager joins a street gang, we consider that behavior maladaptive. The behavior the youngster engages in, as part of street gang life, is clearly against the laws and expectations of society. But from a rehabilitation standpoint it is important to remember that the person is following a set of rules. This person is doing what is expected and conforming to a very specialized sub-culture, probably as an attempt to stay alive. The processes by which behavior becomes maladaptive are similar in learning terms to the processes that lead to adaptive behavior. If a person has adapted successfully to one environment, presumably it is possible to adapt to the expectations of another.

Behavioral interviewing permits cognitive flexibility. Interview questions that solicit opinions place clients in positions they feel obliged to defend. But if you ask for descriptive, factual information, they remain more or less free to let interpretations evolve with the rehabilitation process. We want to establish a therapeutic alliance for the purpose of realizing goals. If the interviewing approach doesn't force the client to invest in an interpretation, then it wont have to be surrendered later on.

To insure a comprehensive assessment it is necessary to inquire about behavior in terms of dimensions that are not necessarily part of a standard interview. When asking about behavior, there are several distinct dimensions we can inquire about. Frequency,

variety, intensity, consequences, amount, rate, direction, latency, conditions, and duration. When inquiring about significant events in a person's life, all of these dimensions might be of assessment value.

Frequency is the dimension of behavior concerning how often something occurs. A question like "How often do you and your spouse go out socially, and when was the last time?" can be important. From such a question it can be determined whether a couple devotes time and attention to their relationship. These insights might not come out if clients use subjective statements like "we have a good relationship."

Variation can also be a critical factor in behavior. With people who have a very concrete approach to behavior, variety is an important assessment dimension. A client who speaks with co-workers fifteen times per day may not have a problem in terms of frequency. But, if the client speaks only about the same topic, variety is an important consideration.

Intensity is also an important aspect of behavior. A client who drinks alcohol only once per month has a serious drinking problem, if the drinking continues to the point of passing out.

Consequences of behavior are also an important consideration. In behavioral interviewing this involves asking about how a behavior or event is connected to other things that occurred subsequently. It's probably best to pose the questions as "What happened next?" rather than saying "What were the consequences?" Because you canno assume a person has sufficient insight to make the link. If a person says "I threw glasses in the bar" and you say "What happened next" and the person responds "Well they tossed me out on the street." You would probably interpret that as a consequence, but the individual might not make the connection.

Amount, or quantity, is an important factor. With some behaviors it makes sense to ask about the amount of the behavior. For example, sleeping, drinking or eating food are behaviors you can measure in terms of amount. If a person responds that s/he drank a quart of wine, that's a measurable and verifiable statement. Such information is more useful from an assessment standpoint than a subjective statement such as "I drank a little". Rate would be the factor to inquire about if the amount of behavior was importan in relation to the passage of time, such as in drinking alcohol.

Direction refers to specific behavioral targets in the environment. In a behavioral interview, if a person said "I was at party and I talked with people," you would lose important information if you didn't ask "which people". If you didn't ask about direction, and it turned out that the client spoke only with men and not with women or only with women and not with men, you would have lost something of potential importance in the assessment.

Latency is also an important behavioral dimension. Latency refers to any delay between the occurrence of something and our response to the occurrence. In a behavioral interview it is helpful to find our if a client's responses to environmental features are immediate or delayed. Similarly, latency of environmental input can be important, and obtained with such questions as "When was the last time your boss praised you, when was the last time he chewed you out?"

Conditions is a general term referring to the environmental features surrounding the person. In order to understand a client's actions it is important to know whether the client was alone, with people, at home, in public, etc.

Duration refers to how long any particular behavior continues. For example, if a client says insomnia was a problem, it would be important to ask how many hour the client spent without sleep.

In a behavioral interview the fullest descriptions from the client are possible wher the interviewer stops talking and permits elaboration. As with all interviewing, silence is challenging because the interviewer may want to make statements or react to what the interviewee is saying. The interviewer must practice using minimal encouragement to illicit continuation of information from the person being interviewed.

Examples of behavioral interview questions appear in Table 1, and are contrasted with examples of questions asked in standard interviews.

A behavioral interview can be helpful if augmented into the rehabilitation process as an assessment tool. It may require practice to go contrary to habits of long standing. There is a paradox in behavioral interviewing. It is natural to assume that a behavioral interview will be entirely descriptive and one dimensional. The paradox is this: that by asking about events in a way that requires a person to describe them in detail, you frequently obtain more feeling information than if you had asked for it directly. The reason may be that when people talk about experiences in the abstract, they become emotionally removed from the experiences themselves. But, when you ask people to "relive" an event in descriptive terms, then you see demonstrated in front of you the feelings and emotions that were occurring when the event happened. In other words, in a behavioral interview the person is not telling you what was felt, the person is showing you what was felt. When people talk descriptively about events in their lives, it is a vivid experience for the interviewer, almost like watching a film. Strong images come up as people describe events they participated in. It can be moving and emotional.

Summary

A behavioral interview is a tool that can be used to identify important elements of the rehabilitation plan. By focusing on both the person and the environment, a behavioral interview will help provide a useful rehabilitation diagnoses. A behavioral

interview can be helpful in identification of skill areas that are critical to the rehabilitation plan, and also identification of areas of the persons life where supports, natural or otherwise could be useful.

The accumulated experience of a rehabilitation counselor is of great valuable in casework. As a practitioner, one can integrate information from behavioral interviews into an expanding base of casework knowledge.

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Table 1. Questions asked in behavioral interviews contrasted with questions typically asked in standard counseling interviews (adapted from Vance, 1991).

Behavioral Interview:	Standard Interview:
What kind of work do you do?	How do you feel about your job?
What do you do on the job?	Do you like your job?
How many hours a week do you work?	Do you have to work too hard?
When was your last raise or promotion?	Are you happy in your work?
What were the circumstances?	Is your job satisfying?
When was the last time your boss praised you?	Do you like your boss?
What happened?	Do you get along well with your boss?
When was the last time your boss chewed you out?	Do you feel your boss is a hostile person?
What happened?	Is your boss mad most of the time?
When was the last time you talked to a co-worker?	Do you get along well with your co-workers?
What did you talk about?	Do you like them?
What did your co-worker say? What did you say?	Do they like you?
What do you say to your friends about your job?	Would you prefer another job?

When was the last time you volunteered for extra work?

What happened when you volunteered?

What is your base pay?

How much do you take home?

Are you looking for another job?

What have you done?

When was the last time you socialized with a co-worker?

How often do you and your spouse go out socially?

When was the last time?

Where did you go?

What did you do?

When you return from work how does your spouse greet you?

How often do you hug and kiss?

Describe the last time.

When was the last time you had sex?

How did it start?

Would you like to make overtime pay?

Are you satisfied with your income?

Would you like to make more money?

Does your salary meet your needs?

What are your future job plans?

Generally, how do you feel about your job?

Overall, is your job a good one?

Do you like people?

Do people like you?

Do you feel that you and your spouse have a good relationship?

Do you have a happy marriage?

Does your spouse meet your needs?

Do you think you have a satisfactory sex life?

Do you and your spouse do a lot of things together?

Do you have fun together?

What happened next?

What did you do? What did your spouse do?

What does your spouse do in his/her spare time?

What do you do?

How are the family finances handled?

How do you decide to buy something?

When was the last time you bought something?

What did you do?

Then what happened?

When was the last time you and your spouse had an argument?

What do you do in your spare time?

When was the last time?

Who was with you?

What did they do?

What did you do?

Do others think your relationship is happy?
Why do they think that?

What is the future of your relationship?

Have you ever had sexual desires about others?

I assume you're in charge of family affairs, money and everything?

Does your spouse ever give you trouble?

When your spouse does, you tell them off, of course?

Do you feel you have an average marriage?
Better than most marriages?

Is your relationship successful?

What do you like to do in your spare time?

Why do you like to do that?

Don't you ever do anything else in your spare time?

Why not?

That's a solitary activity; don't you like people?

When was the time before that?

What other spare time activities do you have?

When was the last time?

Do you do anything around your home?

What do you read?

What do you watch on TV?

When was the last time?

When was the time before that?

What kinds of things do you do with your friends?

When was the last time?

How did the action get started?

What did you do?

When did you last have some time to yourself?

What did you do?

When was the last time you saw a doctor?

What was it about?

Why do you think that you prefer that activity?

What do you think about spare time?

Don't you ever go hunting/fishing?

What are your reasons?

Do you like books?

What is your favorite TV show?

Don't you like TV?

Do you like country music?

What do you think about classical music?

What kind of things do you and your friends like to do?

What are their feelings about those things?

What are their feelings about those things?

Why do they feel that way?

Why aren't you happy by yourself?

Do you feel you have any physical problems?

Why do you think that's so?

What was the last crisis you had?

What did you do?

What happened?

Are you buying things on credit?

How much are your payments?

Do you have a bank accounts?

Are you buying a house?

What are the monthly payments?

When was the last time you had an argument?

With whom? About what?

Do you drink alcohol?

When was the last time?

What happened?

When was the last time you used any drugs?

What happened?

Have you ever smoked pot?

What were the conditions?

What happened?

When was the last time you were verbally or physically attacked?

Are you well adjusted?

Why or why not?

Do you feel any stress?

Are you good with money?

Why do you think that is?

Do you feel money is important?

Why do you feel that way?

What makes you feel good?

Are you basically a happy person?

Why not?

Do you take good care of yourself?

Are you an alcohol or drug abuser?

Why do you think you're not?

Why don't you like people?

Are you psychologically well adjusted?

Why?

Why do you have problems?

Why don't you assert yourself more?

Generally, do you think the world is a good place?

What started it?

How would you change things if you had your way?